



PLANNING DIVISION

**Public Participation Process and Plan**

2021

# **MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PLANNING DIVISION**

## **Public Participation Process and Plan**

### **Background**

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) recognizes the importance of public participation in the planning process. Public participation on both the project and statewide level provides MDOT with a broad range of diverse and meaningful ideas and results in a better planned and implemented statewide transportation system. In coordination with the general public, Federal and State environmental and land management agencies, the eight federally recognized American Indian Tribes, the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and other groups with identifiable interests in Mississippi's transportation system, MDOT has developed this Public Participation Process and Plan.

This process will be used to obtain input from the public and other "interested parties" about proposed transportation improvements in those portions of the State outside the areas served by an MPO. Each MPO will conduct the public participation process for its metropolitan area in accordance with the MPO's Public Participation Plan. There are established MPOs for the metropolitan areas surrounding Jackson, Memphis, Hattiesburg, and the Gulf Coast. Each MPO has its own Public Participation Process and Plan, and each is generally consistent with MDOT's Public Participation Process and Plan.

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) operates its programs and services without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended and related statutes and implementing authorities.

### **Purpose**

This MDOT Public Participation Process and Plan is intended to establish methods to provide the general public and other interested parties with ongoing timely information about transportation issues and the transportation decision-making process. This will be accomplished by:

- Providing reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP);
- Providing adequate notice of public involvement activities and times for public review and comment at key decision points. This includes, but is not limited to, reasonable opportunities to comment on the proposed Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan and the more immediate STIP;

- Ensuring that, to the maximum extent practicable, public involvement events or opportunities are held at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Using, to the maximum extent practicable, visualization techniques to describe proposed statewide transportation plans and supporting studies;
- Making, as appropriate, public information available in electronically accessible formats on the internet in order to afford reasonable opportunities for public comment;
- Demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input during the development of the Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan and the STIP;
- Providing a process for seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority household members who may face challenges accessing employment and other services;
- Undertaking periodic reviews, no less frequently than every five years, of the effectiveness of this public involvement process to ensure that the process provides full and open access to all “interested parties”; and
- Revising this process to assure continuing improvement

### **Interested Parties**

This Public Participation Process and Plan frequently refers to “interested parties.” Throughout this document, “interested parties” are the agencies, people, and groups MDOT will be consulting with as it develops or amends its Transportation Improvement Plans. These are the people MDOT coordinated with as they developed this Public Participation Process and Plan. These “interested parties” include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The general public;
- Public transportation agencies;
- Non-metropolitan local elected officials;
- Federal and State environmental and land management agencies;
- Federally recognized American Indian Tribes;
- Agencies responsible for historic preservation;
- Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities;
- Representatives of the disabled;
- Freight shippers;
- Providers of freight transportation services; and
- Representatives of minority, low income, and traditionally underserved groups.

*A list of identified “interested parties” is available upon request.*

## **Mississippi's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)**

### ***Jackson Urbanized Area***

Central Mississippi Planning and Development District  
1020 Centre Pointe Boulevard  
Pearl, Mississippi 39208  
601-981-1511  
<http://www.cmpdd.org/>

### ***Gulf Coast Urbanized Area***

Gulf Regional Planning Commission  
1635 Popp's Ferry Road, Suite G  
Biloxi, Mississippi 39532  
228-864-1167  
<http://www.grpc.com/>

### ***Hattiesburg Urbanized Area***

Hattiesburg-Petal-Lamar-Forrest MPO  
P. O. Box 1898  
Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39403  
601-545-6259  
<http://www.hattiesburgms.com/mpo/>

### ***Mississippi portion of the Memphis Urbanized Area***

Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization  
125 N. Main Street, Suite 450  
Memphis, Tennessee 38103  
901-576-7190  
<http://memphismpo.org/>

Each of the MPOs is responsible for the planning functions in its metropolitan area. Each MPO has its own written Public Participation Plan. The MPOs and MDOT have coordinated the development of the public participation plans so that the processes, although differing in details and format, are essentially the same. These Public Participation Plans were developed through a public participation process similar to the one described here. The MPOs will conduct the public participation processes for all Federally funded transportation projects in their respective urban areas, and MDOT's process will be used for all Federally funded transportation projects in the non-urbanized parts of the State. The MPOs' plans address City, County, and MDOT sponsored projects inside the MPO boundaries. MDOT coordinates closely with the MPOs and is represented on each MPOs' Technical Committee and Policy Board.

## **Transportation Plans**

The MPOs and MDOT conduct many planning studies. Most are to address specific transportation problems or needs. Some of these studies result in the identification of major needed projects, but the majority address specific localized problems such as how to improve operations along a particular corridor. The MPOs and MDOT involve the public and other interested parties in these studies to the extent that they have expertise and knowledge that would be helpful in identifying viable solutions to the identified transportation problems.

However, there are two types of plans (MDOT's Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan and the STIP) that address the overall transportation system and help allocate priorities and resources for the future. Only transportation projects identified by these plans are eligible for Federal funding.

**Long Range Plans:** Each MPO develops a Long Range Transportation Plan for its urban area. This plan projects transportation needs, strategies, and goals for the coming 25 years. The plan can be fairly general and does not usually cover all specific projects. It is more an assessment of needs and strategies than of solutions. MDOT develops a long range plan for the rest of the State and incorporates the concepts identified in the MPOs' plans into the Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan. The MPOs' Long Range Transportation Plans must be updated at least every five years. The MDOT Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan is updated as needed, but at least every five years. MDOT's Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan can only be developed or amended through the MDOT Public Participation Process and Plan described here.

**Short Range Plans:** Each MPO develops a project specific and fiscally constrained Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) detailing the projects and project phases for which the MPO intends to apply for Federal funding over the next four years. This includes MDOT projects in urbanized areas. MDOT develops a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) that incorporates the projects in the MPOs' TIPs plus all projects outside the urbanized areas. Only projects in the approved STIP can be Federally funded. Certain types of projects that are categorically excluded from detailed environmental analysis can be grouped rather than listed individually in the TIPs and the STIP. Federal regulations require the TIPs and the STIP to be updated at least every four years but they may be updated, amended, or modified more frequently. The TIPs and the STIP, as well as amendments to them, can only be developed through the MPOs' and MDOT's Public Participation Processes and Plans.

Note that the MPOs and MDOT are allowed to make minor administrative modifications to the TIPs and to the STIP without going through a Public Participation Process. Such administrative modifications cannot be made for substantial changes like adding or deleting projects, changing the scope of a project to the extent that the type of environmental document required changes, changing funding so that a TIP or the STIP is

no longer fiscally constrained, or any change requiring a new regional air quality conformity finding (including a grouping). Typically administrative modifications are things like minor changes in the costs of a project, or a change in the year of initiation of a project phase. Thresholds used to determine if the project change is acceptable for an administrative modification are as follows:

**PROJECT COST CHANGE THRESHOLDS:**

For changes to the cost of projects (excluding groupings), a sliding scale is outlined to determine which category of revision is required. All measurements for these cost changes will be made from the last approved STIP/TIP or STIP/TIP amendment/administrative adjustment to account for incremental changes.

Total project cost of all phases shown within the approved TIP	Amendment	Administrative Adjustment
Up to \$2 million	≥75%	< 75%
\$2 million to \$15 million	≥50%	< 50%
\$15 million to \$75 million	≥40%	<40%
\$75 million and above	≥30%	<30%

In the urbanized areas, the Public Participation Process will be considered to be satisfied when the short and long range plans and amendments to them have gone through public and “interested” party coordination as described in the MPOs’ Public Participation Plan. This applies to locally sponsored, as well as MDOT sponsored, projects. Once the MPOs’ Public Participation Processes are complete and an MPO approves a new plan, amendment, or administrative modification, the approved change will be forwarded to MDOT for inclusion in the Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan or in the STIP without further public participation. MDOT will then forward the change to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for approval. Upon approval, a new plan or amendment becomes effective. Administrative modifications are submitted to FHWA for informational purposes.

## **MDOT'S Public Participation Process and Plan**

Outside the MPO urbanized areas, MDOT will conduct the Public Participation Process and Plan. The process will be used for new Long Range Statewide Transportation Plans and amendments, as well as development of a new STIP, and amendments to the non-urbanized portions of the STIP. The process is as follows:

1. MDOT will make any proposed new Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan or proposed new STIP, available on the MDOT website for public review and comment for a period of not less than 45 days. Proposed amendments to the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan or to the STIP will be available for review for 10 days. In addition, the availability of the proposed plans or amendments will be advertised in a newspaper with statewide circulation and in publications that target typically underserved populations. They will inform the public of the availability of the plans or amendments for review and comment and will also notify the public of any scheduled public involvement events or opportunities. Reviewers will be able to make comments through the website, by mail, or other platform. During the review period, any proposed plans or amendments to existing plans will be available at MDOT District Offices and MPO offices, along with comment forms. Interested Parties are also encouraged to visit local public libraries to view the plans on the internet.
2. Public involvement events or opportunities will be held for review and comment on draft Statewide Long Range Transportation Plans , the draft STIP, the Public Participation Process and Plan , and other plans or programs as deemed necessary by MDOT. Each meeting location will comply with all mandates established in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Individuals with questions or special needs may contact the MDOT Planning Division Public Participation Process and Plan coordinator at (601) 359-7685 at least five days prior to the meeting.
3. When the proposed plans or amendments are made available on the website for public review, all "interested parties" will be contacted by email or letter and asked to comment within the 45 or 10-day review period. "Interested parties" will be requested to participate in any scheduled public involvement events or opportunities.
4. For new STIPs and new Statewide Long Range Transportation Plans, MDOT will hold public involvement events or opportunities to receive additional comments from the public. These events or opportunities will allow MDOT to receive comments and suggestions that could impact the development of transportation projects in the state. The events or opportunities will be held not less than 14 days from the first advertisement. MDOT will ensure that all public involvement events or opportunities will be held at convenient and accessible locations and times. When public involvement events or opportunities are held, MDOT will

normally schedule one meeting in each of the three Transportation Commission districts.

5. MDOT will use maps, charts, and/or other visualization techniques, to the extent possible, to graphically demonstrate plans or proposed amendments. MDOT will provide any technical and policy information used in the development of the STIP.
6. All comments received will be considered, and MDOT will respond to each commenter and explain its proposed action on the comment.
7. Since public hearings will rarely be held for amendments, MDOT will advise anyone whose comment on an amendment is not favorably received of the time and place of the Transportation Commission meeting where the amendment will be presented for approval. Commenters will be advised that they may present comments to the Transportation Commission at that time. All Transportation Commission meetings are open to the public.
8. All new plans or amendments will be submitted to the Transportation Commission for approval. Upon approval, MDOT will submit the approved plan or amendment to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for approval.
9. With the approval of FHWA and FTA, the plan or amendment becomes official.

#### **Future Changes in the Public Participation Process and Plan**

MDOT will continually monitor the effectiveness of this Public Participation Process and Plan. It may be modified from time to time to expand its usefulness as a tool to encourage public and “interested party” input into the Transportation Planning Process. The process will be formally reviewed every five years. At that time the Process Plan itself will go through the same public involvement process described for new plans in steps one through nine above, with interested parties having 60 days to comment.

Any comments or suggestions you have about this plan can be directed to:

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Mississippi Department of Transportation  
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601-359-7685  
Email: [planning@mdot.ms.gov](mailto:planning@mdot.ms.gov)